US professor critical of Zionism resigns after tenure denial

Joe Kay
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Norman Finkelstein, an author and prominent critic of Zionism and Israeli policy, resigned from DePaul University on September 5. His resignation came after he was denied tenure at the Chicago university and then had his final classes cancelled.

The resignation of Finkelstein comes under duress—after an extensive campaign of vilification in which the professor and author has been portrayed as anti-Semitic and unprofessional. Finkelstein is a renowned scholar who is known for his many books, including *The Holocaust Industry*—an examination of the way in which the Holocaust has been exploited to advance interests that have nothing to do with the victims of the Nazi genocide.

Finkelstein, the son of Holocaust survivors, has been one of the most prominent targets of right-wing professors and media figures for years. He has been targeted in particular for his opposition to Israeli policy and to the attempt by Zionists to use the charge of anti-Semitism as a means of suppressing criticism and justifying Israel's violations of human rights and international law.

In June, Finkelstein was denied tenure at DePaul, despite support from his department, his students, and the faculty of the university. In a highly unusual move, the University Board on Promotion and Tenure, supported by DePaul's president, Fr. Dennis Holtschneider, and College of Arts and Sciences Dean Charles Suchar, overruled the faculty.

According to standard procedure, a faculty member who is denied tenure is allowed to continue teaching for one year, while he or she looks for work at another campus. In August, however, the university moved abruptly to cancel Finkelstein's remaining classes and bar him from using his office on campus.

Finkelstein responded by pledging that he would hold his classes with or without the support of the university, and had planned on giving his first lecture outside, on the university quad. He vowed a campaign of civil disobedience, and threatened a hunger strike if he was arrested.

Last week, however, Finkelstein issued a statement declaring that he was resigning and that he would not continue to fight the university's decision. In a statement he read aloud on September 5, Finkelstein said that his denial of tenure was the outcome of "external pressures climaxing in a national hysteria that tainted the tenure process."

Among those most active in pressuring for denial of tenure was Harvard University professor Alan Dershowitz, who has clashed numerous times with Finkelstein on questions relating to Israel and Palestine. Dershowitz wrote a memo attacking Finkelstein, which he distributed to DePaul's faculty. He also waged a campaign to prevent publication of Finkelstein's new book, *Beyond Chutzpah: On the Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*. The book was published earlier this year.

In his statement, Finkelstein thanked DePaul for providing him a place to teach for six years, "despite overwhelming external pressures." For its part, the university released a statement insisting that there was no external influence in the tenure decision process. DePaul also called Finkelstein "a prolific scholar and an outstanding teacher." The statement did not attempt to square this with the decision to prevent Finkelstein from continuing to teach at the university.

The decision to cancel Finkelstein's remaining classes was made in response to the allegedly confrontational behavior that he exhibited after being denied tenure. According to a June 26 memo obtained by the *Chicago Tribune*, written by university Provost

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Helmut Epp, Finkelstein "angrily confronted" other faculty and engaged in "threatening and discourteous behavior." He was said to have argued with Dean Suchar and when the dean tried to duck into an elevator, Finkelstein allegedly held the door open to prevent an end to the discussion.

The political science department, which had originally backed Finkelstein, seized on this memo to recommend that he be given "non-residential leave" for one year—essentially pushing him out without an additional year of teaching. This was a cowardly retreat on the part of the department.

Finkelstein was never given an opportunity to reply to the charges, which were not raised as a reason for canceling his classes until August—two months after the alleged incidents occurred and too close to the beginning of the semester for Finkelstein to respond.

DePaul has never adequately explained its reasons for denying Finkelstein tenure. A statement from President Holtschneider in June cited his supposed "*ad hominem* attacks on scholars with whom you disagree." Finkelstein's lack of collegial behavior was said to violate the Catholic university's code of conduct.

A statement from the University Board on Promotion and Tenure said, "Some might interpret parts of his scholarship as 'deliberately hurtful' as well as provocative more for inflammatory effect than to carefully critique or challenge accepted assumptions." While the board did not indicate whose opinions it was citing, they evidently were not those of DePaul's faculty and students, who generally supported Finkelstein.

Given these circumstances, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that Finkelstein was denied tenure, and eventually pressured out of DePaul, because he is outspoken in his political views—opposition to Zionism and the misuse of the charge of anti-Semitism. His firing constitutes a dangerous precedent and a further erosion of democratic rights in the US.

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